

Message Text

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AMCONSUL LUBUMBASHI
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMCONSUL STUTTGART

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: CG, SOPR

SUBJECT:POST ARTICLE ON OTRAG

1FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF DAVID LAMB ARTICLE, DATELINE LUBUMBASHI, APPEARING ON PAGE A7 OF AUGUST 22 WASHINGTON POST AND ENTITLED "FROM DEEP IN AFRICA WEST GERMANS TAKE AIM ON SPACE." QUOTE:

LAST MAY PRESIDENT MOBUTU SESE SEKO AND HIS ADVISERS GATHERED NEAR HERE AT A WEST GERMAN COMPANY'S ROCKET BASE NICKNAMED "AFRICA'S CAPE CANAVERAL" TO WATCH A LAUNCHING.

THE ROCKET ROARED OFF ITS PAD, SHIMMIED CRAZILY AND PLUMMETED INTO THE JUNGLE WITH A DEAFENING CRASH. THE ZAIRIAN OFFICIALS, NOT CERTAIN WHAT THE ROCKET WAS MEANT TO DO, APPLAUDED.

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IT WAS A BIZARRE TWIST TO AN UNUSUAL VENTURE IN SHABA PROVINCE. A WEST GERMAN COMPANY HAS LEASED VIRTUALLY SOVEREIGN RIGHTS TO 39,000 SQUARE MILES OF ZAIRE AND IS DEVELOPING A LOW-COST LAUNCH VEHICLE TO PUT SATELLITES INTO ORBIT BY 1981.

THE COMPANY, ORBITAL TRANSPORT AND ROCKET CORP., SAYS THE \$467 MILLION PROJECT IS PURELY COMMERCIAL AND HAS NO MILITARY IMPLICATIONS. IT SAYS IT HOPES EVENTUALLY TO PUT SATELLITES INTO ORBIT FOR AS LITTLE AS \$4 MILLION PER LAUNCH, THUS GIVING THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES ACCESS TO TELECOMMUNICATIONS, METEOROLOGY AND RESOURCE SURVEYS.

SUCH EXPLANATIONS HAVE FAILED TO CALM AFRICAN FEARS THAT THE PROJECT MAY BE MILITARY, PERHAPS SOMEHOW RELATED TO THE DEFENSE OF SOUTH AFRICA. AFRICANS HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN THAT IN 1975 A RANKING WEST GERMAN GENERAL TRAVELED SECRETLY TO JOHANNESBURG TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE NUCLEAR CO-OPERATION.

THE SOVIET UNION AND EAST GERMANY HAVE EXPLOITED THESE FEARS WITH A MAJOR PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN, CLAIMING THAT THIS "SPEAR IN THE HEART OF AFRICA" IS PART OF A NATO PLOT, AIDED BY THE CIA, TO HELP BONN DEVELOP A MISSILE SIMILAR TO THE U.S. CRUISE MISSILE. THE BASE, THE SOVIETS ADD, COULD BE USED AGAINST THE "PROGRESSIVE COUNTRIES" RINGING SOUTH AFRICA.

BUT NOTHING HAS SURFACED TO SUGGEST THAT THE BASE IS INTENDED FOR ANYTHING OTHER THAN WHAT THE GERMAN FIRM CLAIMS. THE CIA AND THE WEST GERMAN GOVERNMENT HAVE DENIED THAT CRUISE MISSILES ARE IN ANY WAY INVOLVED.
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INDEPENDENT OBSERVERS AND WESTERN JOURNALISTS WHO HAVE VISITED THE BASE, AN HOUR'S FLIGHT FROM LUBUMBASHI, SAY THERE IS NOTHING SINISTER OR SECRET ABOUT THE SITE.

SECURITY IS LAX, THEY SAY, AND THE FACILITIES AMOUNT TO LITTLE MORE THAN AN UNPAVED 6,000-FT. RUNWAY, A SIX-FOOT DEEP CONTROL AND FIRING BUNKER, A PRE-FAB ALUMINUM-AND-GLASS FLIGHT CONTROL CENTER AND ACCOMMODATIONS FOR THE STAFF OF 40 GERMANS AND 100 ZAIRIANS. THERE ARE NO UNDERGROUND INSTALLATIONS, VISITORS SAY.

THE BASE IS LOCATED IN A BARELY ACCESSIBLE, LARGELY UN-POPULATED AREA OF NORTHEAST SHABA PROVINCE, MIDWAY BETWEEN THE TOWNS OF MANONO AND PWETO. TO DISPEL REPORTS THAT IT IS A CLANDESTINE FACILITY, THE GERMAN COMPANY RECENTLY PRESENTED AN ELABORATE SLIDE SHOW ABOUT THE BASE AND ITS USES DURING A NATIONAL FAIR IN KINSHASA.

THE GERMANS SAY THAT THE SITE WAS CHOSEN THREE YEARS AGO BECAUSE OF ITS PROXIMITY TO THE EQUATOR - AN IMPORTANT ADVANTAGE TO LOW COST LAUNCHING - AND BECAUSE OF ITS LOW POPULATION DENSITY.

THE CONTRACT THAT GIVES THE COMPANY RIGHTS TO THE AREA UNTIL THE YEAR 2000 WAS SIGNED IN MARCH 1976 BY A ZAIRIAN PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER AND THE COMPANY'S PRESIDENT, LUTZ T. KAYSER.

ZAIRE IS TO RECEIVE A RENTAL FEE OF \$37 MILLION A YEAR WHEN THE ENTERPRISE SHOWS A PROFIT. IN ADDITION, PRESIDENT MOBUTU PERMITS AN AIRCRAFT COMPANY RELATED TO THE ROCKET COMPANY TO HAUL FREIGHT BETWEEN KINSHASA AND SHABA PROVINCE. MOBUTU PERSONALLY HAS BEEN GIVEN 47 PERCENT OF THE AVIATION PROFITS, COMPANY SOURCES SAID.

KAYSER HAS SAID THAT THE DEMAND FOR PEACEFUL SATELLITES
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WILL MUSHROOM, PARTICULARLY FROM THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES, IF THEY CAN BE PROVIDED AT REASONABLE COST. HIS COMPANY USES SIMPLIFIED ELECTRONICS AND ENGINES. THE FUEL IS ORDINARY OIL OR KEROSENE WITH NITRIC ACID AS AN OXIDIZER.

THE IDEA IS TO BIND TOGETHER A CLUSTER OF INEXPENSIVE ROCKETS, EACH DEVELOPING 6,000 POUNDS OF THRUST, TO LIFT A PAYLOAD OF 1 TO 10 TONS INTO ORBIT. THE MAY LAUNCH WAS THE THIRD AND MOST RECENT. ALL HAVE FAILED. END QUOTE.

2. FOLLOWING PRESS GUIDANCE WAS PREPARED FOR NOON BRIEFING BUT SUBJECT DID NOT COME UP: QUOTE:

Q: CAN YOU COMMENT ON TODAY'S WASHINGTON POST ARTICLE ON THE WEST GERMAN SPACE PROJECT IN ZAIRE?

A: WE HAVE RESPONDED TO NUMEROUS QUERIES ABOUT THE OTRAG PROJECT IN THE PAST AND HAVE NOTHING NEW TO ADD TO OUR PREVIOUS STATEMENTS.

ALSO AS THE ARTICLE CONFIRMS, THERE IS NO EVIDENCE TO INDICATE THAT THE FACILITY IN ZAIRE IS NOT EXACTLY WHAT OTRAG'S DIRECTORS DECLARE IT TO BE: A ROCKET TESTING AREA, INVOLVING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROCKET LAUNCHERS TO BE USED FOR CIVILIAN PURPOSES SUCH AS COMMUNICATION, WEATHER AND NATURAL RESOURCES DETECTOR SATELLITES. THE ROCKETS ARE OF A TYPE WHICH WOULD NOT BE SUITABLE FOR MILITARY APPLICATION. END QUOTE. CHRISTOPHER

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